



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Apostle Islands National Lakeshore
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IN REPLY REFER TO:

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STATEMENT BY APOSTLE ISLANDS NATIONAL LAKESHORE SUPERINTENDENT BOB KRUMENAKER

SUBJECT: PROPOSED RECREATIONAL USER FEES

Today I am announcing the National Park Service's proposed recreational user fee rates for 2007 at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. This is the critical point in a process which began with the Congressional enactment of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act in 2004 and an informal public involvement process that began here last March. It also marks the beginning of a more formal period of public comment for the next 30 days, at the conclusion of which we will evaluate the public input we receive and put together our final proposal for agency review and approval.

Each year the park hosts between 150 and 200 thousand visitors, who admire the scenery and the natural and cultural resources, but also use the 13 public docks, 64 campsites, 59 miles of hiking trails, 37 outhouses, 3 visitor centers, or one of the 6 light houses that have been called, collectively, the "finest collection of historic light houses" in the country. Recreational users also enjoy the more than 27,000 acres of Lake Superior within the National Lakeshore.

Apostle Islands National Lakeshore belongs to the American people. When the National Park Service was established by Congress in 1916, the agency was given a mission which is still critical to the American people, but increasingly challenging to fulfill: *"to conserve the scenery, and the natural and historic objects and wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same ... as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."*

Conserving the scenery, providing for the enjoyment, and leaving them unimpaired requires active management, skilled staff, and ultimately money to make it all work. Congress provides for an annual appropriation for the National Lakeshore, and this year it is a little less than \$2.5 million by the time it weaves its way down to the park. It sounds like a lot, and it's actually the highest budget we've ever had, although it's only slightly higher than last year's number. But the Business Plan we completed several years ago, according to a standardized methodology used across the National Park System, showed that Apostle Islands has an operating shortfall almost double the typical park¹ that has done the same analysis.

We've seen an 11% erosion of purchasing power since 2001. The number of paid working hours by park staff has decreased 20% since 2003. Nearly one in six work hours is now provided by a volunteer. The park has undertaken a major effort to increase efficiencies, reduce costs, and be accountable for every dollar we spend. Like other businesses, however, fuel and health care costs are out of our control, and salaries, unlike other businesses, are set by Congress. Despite the reduction in staff, personnel costs have increased from 85% to 88% and therefore the park has seen a \$62,000 reduction in non-personnel operations since 2003.

Another way of saying that is that once the fixed costs are paid, the funding that the park can spend on routine maintenance and visitor services has shrunk to an all-time low. That amount fell from over \$300 thousand several years ago to only \$126 thousand in 2005. This is the critical money used to repair docks and clear trails, to do the important but small repairs to keep historic buildings from being overwhelmed by the elements, to staff lighthouses with seasonal park rangers, to open visitor centers and give interpretive programs, and to monitor and restore natural resources. Fewer dollars in the park's budget translate to fewer services we can provide and lesser protection for the park's scenery and resources we're supposed to conserve unimpaired.

¹ 58% gap between needs and available financial resources at Apostle Islands; the average of the 30+ parks that have done a similar analysis shows 30-35% gap. See the park's business plan at <http://www.bpi.nps.gov/docs/bizplans/APISbp.pdf>.

All this is preamble to saying that there has to be another way to augment the funding for parks to achieve our mission. This has been a challenge since the first days of the national parks. Over the years Congress has established a variety of fee programs to enhance national park revenues and target these funds for particular beneficial uses. Unlike Apostle Islands, most national park areas charge entrance fees and camping fees. The NPS has never charged fees here for entering the park, overnight camping, use of docks, interpretive programs, lighthouse tours, boat launching, or emergency search and rescue. Fees for many of these activities are common in most other national and state parks.

In 2004, Congress replaced previous fee directives with a new, comprehensive, and more uniform fee program for federal recreation areas. Under this new authority – the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) – the National Park Service established procedures under which park managers are to identify new fee options. Park managers like me are required to communicate and engage with community members and stakeholders about the new fees and consider legitimate issues that are raised prior to submitting a formal proposal for agency review and approval. We've been "engaging" since March, have met with hundreds of people, and we've heard a lot of opinions. This input has been essential as we crafted the various fee options.

By agency policy, 100% of the fee revenue collected at Apostle Islands will stay at Apostle Islands, and will be used for the critical and highly visible projects which will benefit the public. This new funding will supplement, not replace, appropriated revenues, and make a significant difference in the quality of services provided to visitors. It goes straight into that pot of money "beyond fixed costs" and therefore has a huge impact on what we can do in the field.

We expect to use the fee revenue to restore services that have eroded, improve the condition of park facilities and services, and reduce our maintenance backlog on such projects as:

- improved dock maintenance
- maintaining and enhancing campgrounds, trails, and picnic areas
- preservation of historic buildings and cultural landscapes
- habitat restoration directly related to wildlife-dependent recreation
- enhanced interpretive displays and tours
- enhanced availability for emergency response (e.g. search, rescue, first aid)

The specific recreational user fees that we are proposing are as follows:

- Overnight camping (\$10-20 per site per night)
- Overnight docking (\$10-20 per boat per night)
- Parking
 - Meyers Beach (\$3-5 per vehicle per day, annual rate \$15-25)
 - Park Headquarters (\$5-8 overnight, \$10-20 for special events)
- Guided tours and interpretive programs (\$3-5 per person, family rate available)

These are described in more detail on the handout.

There are several things notable for their absence from this list. Note we are not proposing any park entrance fees. Hence day users, and even those who anchor overnight within park waters, will not be subject to any park fees unless they leave their vehicle somewhere there is a parking fee or participate in an interpretive tour that has a fee. Please note that parking will remain free at Little Sand Bay, in order to assure that a popular section of the park remains available for people of all income levels. The existing camping reservation fee will also be eliminated in favor of the overnight camping fee.

For any fees to be accepted by the public and be cost-effective, it is essential that the National Park Service keep the internal costs of the program as low as possible. While we have not yet worked out every last detail, I can assure you that we can and will implement this program without hiring any new field staff to either collect or enforce the fees. One way we can both save money and increase convenience for park users is

that the new law allows us to work with non-NPS partners (on a willing basis, of course) to collect fees outside the park on our behalf. Our expectation is that Apostle Islands National Lakeshore docking and interpretive tour tickets will be widely available in the Chequamegon Bay area, minimizing inconvenience to park visitors. We'll also have self-serve fee stations at popular sites. Whether with the NPS or with a partner, most fees will be transacted on the mainland, not on the islands, limiting the intrusion on the park experience, and the amount of cash that visitors need to carry.

Our projections suggest that we should be able to clear at least \$75,000 after expenses, all of which will be used for the kind of projects I mentioned earlier. This is almost a five-fold increase in fee revenue for the park from the existing program. If that revenue were available last year, it would have increased the project funding within the park's budget by almost 60%. Our hope is that we will earn the community's support through fairness and accountability for how the funds are spent.

By deciding not to pursue the entrance fees, however, I must tell you that we are forgoing a potential revenue stream which could have brought in an additional \$100,000 per year to the benefit of the park, its visitors, and its natural and cultural resources and infrastructure.

In thinking about how to recover some of that lost opportunity, I remembered that quite a number of people told me over the past year that they understood the financial needs of operating the park and were willing to contribute if they could do so voluntarily, and in particular, if it could be done on a tax-deductible basis. I am pleased to announce that the Friends of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, working closely with us, have come up with a win-win idea, and I will turn the podium over to Ruth Goetz, the Chairperson of the Friends, to describe that.